

ISRAEL

What's daily life like for Palestinians in Israeli prisons?

BY LINDA GRADSTEIN

DECEMBER 18, 2011 1:48 AM



Samer al-Issawi spent time in five Israeli prisons for shooting at Israeli soldiers before he was released in the first phase of the swap for Gilad Shalit. (Linda Gradstein)



OFER, West Bank (JTA) — When Israel released the second phase of the Gilad Shalit exchange deal, thousands of fellow Palestinians in Israeli jails

According to the Israeli Prison Service, there are 2,816 security prisoners and 1,824 being held for criminal

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?



Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)



No, thanks.



I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send

the
g behind

,816

Unlike the conditions in which Shalit was held for more than five years – largely incommunicado, with no visits, little direct sunlight and no knowledge of when, or if, he'd be freed – Israel says it carefully regulates its treatment of Palestinian prisoners.

“The Palestinian prisoners are held in accordance with the law’s regulations, and their basic rights – such as food, conditions of imprisonment and medical treatment – are upheld,” Prison Service spokeswoman Sivan Weizmann told JTA.

Some Palestinians are in jail for relatively minor infractions, like entering Israel without a permit. Others are incarcerated for terrorism-related crimes, including murder.

Israel’s treatment of its Palestinian prisoners is closely watched and sometimes criticized by Israeli and Palestinian human rights groups, but Israel supporters argue that the treatment reflects well on Israel and contrasts sharply with how Israeli captives have been treated by Palestinians.

While the Israeli Prison Service declined to allow JTA to tour a prison, one Palestinian prisoner who was released in the first phase of the Shalit deal – Samer al-Issawi, a member of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine – talked with JTA in detail about conditions in the prisons in which he was held.

In 2001, Issawi was sentenced to 30 years in prison for shooting at Israeli soldiers entering his village of Isawiya, in eastern Jerusalem. He spent time in five Israeli prisons, including eight months in isolation in the Hadarim prison following an altercation with prison guards.

Speaking with JTA in his family home, Issawi said that is approximately 25 feet by 15 feet. Each cell has a small window and a TV that receives 12 channels, including Israeli channels, and a TV among them Palestinian TV.

The prisoners are provided with ready-made meals. Issawi said the prisoners cooked for themselves because they didn't like the food.

“There was a lot of oil in it and the rice was uncooked,” he said.

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?



Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)



No, thanks.



I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send

Issawi's parents deposited money in an account that he could use to buy food and cigarettes at the prison canteen. One of the punishments for misbehavior is loss of canteen privileges.

The daily schedule in prison is rigorously followed. At 7 a.m., prisoners are allowed into a courtyard to exercise for an hour. For two hours each morning and each afternoon, prisoners may leave their cells to visit prisoners in other cell blocks.

Security prisoners are housed separately from criminal prisoners, and Palestinians are separated from Israelis, both Jews and Arabs.

On Fridays, Muslim prisoners may pray together in the prison courtyard. A prisoner serves as the imam, or prayer leader.

Issawi said he had no complaints about the medical care. The prisoners have doctors at the prison and, when necessary, are treated at Israeli hospitals.

Human rights groups complain that many prisoners do not receive family visits. All but the security prison at Ofer are in Israel rather than in the West Bank, so Palestinian family members must obtain permits to enter Israel in order to visit.

Since 2007, prisoners who come from Gaza do not receive family visits because Israel does not allow anyone from Gaza to enter Israel except for humanitarian cases, such as medical treatment.

Only parents are allowed to visit, and for only 45 minutes every two weeks. No direct contact is allowed between the prisoners and their families, who talk by phone with a glass wall between them.

"My brothers and sisters got married, and I could not attend," Issawi said.

During Shalit's captivity in Gaza, he was not allowed to see his family. He was not given the Red Cross. He was held underground most of the time, and he complained of a deficiency due to inadequate sunlight when he was in the cell. He also was not given enough food and water, and he was not given enough funds due to inadequate nutrition. He also was not given enough money to buy food and cigarettes.

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐ Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐ No, thanks.

☐ I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet? **Send**

Shalit's father, Noam, told Israeli media that his son was "mistreated" during the first months after his capture, although his conditions later improved and he was allowed access to radio and television.

Until Shalit was taken captive in 2006, Palestinian prisoners in Israel were able to take courses to obtain high school degrees and even enroll in college courses. After Shalit was seized, however, Israel rescinded the privilege and it has not been reinstated.

Many prisoners learn Hebrew from speaking with prison guards. Issawi said other prisoners presented lectures and classes in Hebrew and English. At the prison library, Issawi said he read mostly books about politics and Marxism.

His main complaint was that some prison guards were abusive.

"Some just did their job, but others would curse at prisoners or even hit them," he said.

Issawi said guards often responded to minor infractions by firing tear gas into individual cells. In 10 years in prison, he said he was never beaten but saw others beaten. Israeli law prohibits any physical punishment of prisoners, except in cases where a guard's life or those of other prisoners are in danger.

Issawi's sister, Shireen, a lawyer who was released several months ago after a year in jail, said that she was arrested for membership in the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine and spent four months in solitary confinement. Her cell only had a bed, shower and toilet, and she was limited to one hour per day outside in a small courtyard.

The spokeswoman for the Prison Service said:

Issawi says he is happy to be home and looks forward to seeing his family. He says Israel should release all of the Palestinian security detainees.

"Either release the prisoners or there will be no more prisoners. People can't just sit in jail forever."

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐ Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐ No, thanks.

☐ I'm already a subscriber.

Not using Hotjar yet? **Send**

TRENDING ON JTA



Polish newspaper's front p
recognize a Jew'

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

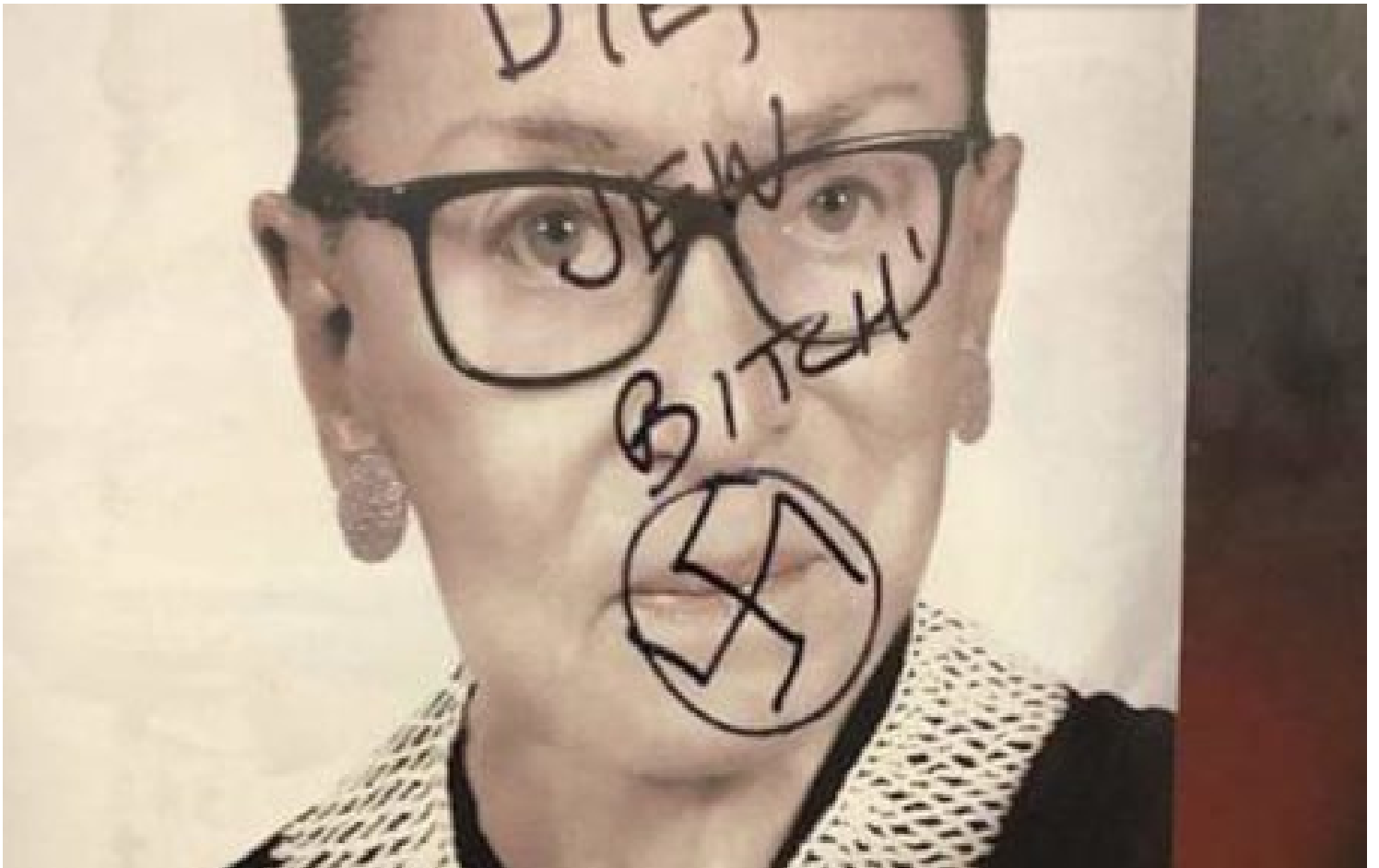
No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



Ruth Bader Ginsburg poster in Brooklyn vandalized with the words 'Die, Jew bitch' and a swastika

A background image of a night sky with a bright streak of light, possibly a meteor or rocket trail, extending from the bottom left towards the top left.

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐ Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐ No, thanks.

☐ I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet? **Send**



Sirens blare as 2 rockets are fired at Tel Aviv from Gaza

Get JTA's Daily Briefing in your inbox

Email

SUBSCRIBE

☐ I accept the JTA Privacy Policy.

By submitting the above I agree to the privacy policy and terms of use of JTA.org

RECOMMENDED FROM

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐ Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐ No, thanks.

☐ I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



POLITICS

4 things to watch at this year's AIPAC conference

BY RON KAMPEAS

| MARCH 19, 2019 4:45 PM

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

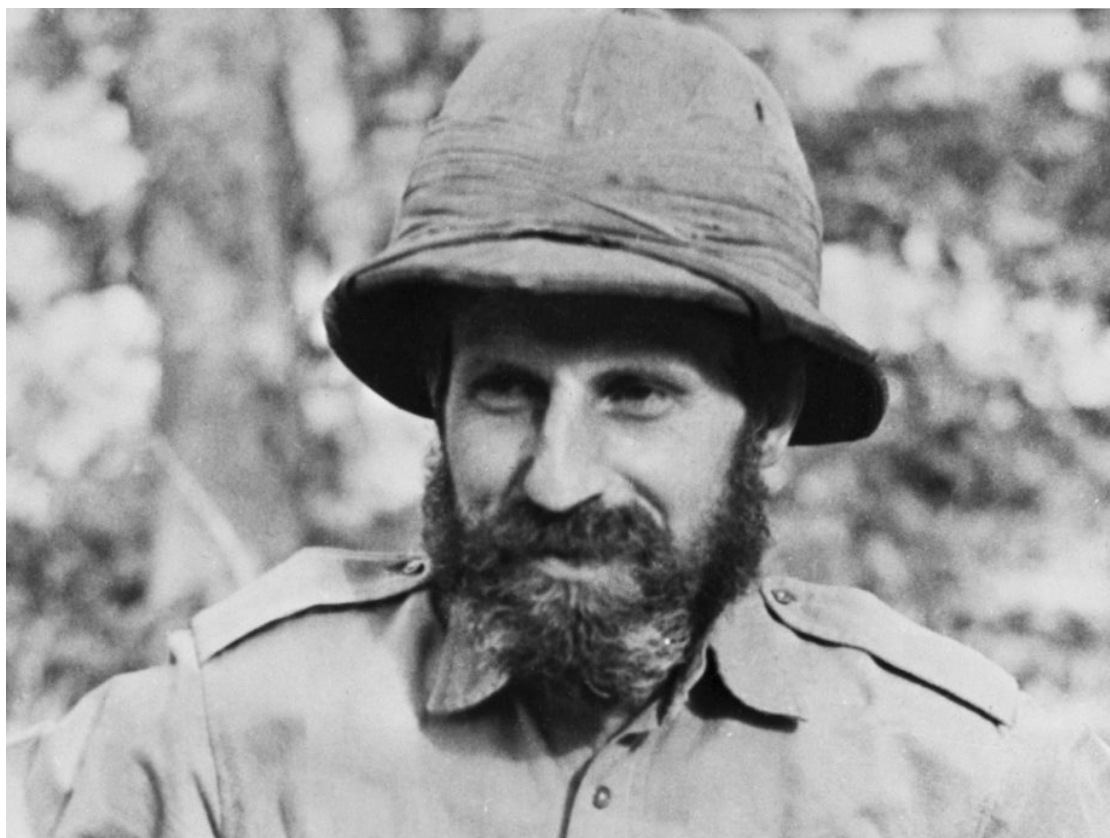
No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



ISRAEL

Why a Bible-toting, onion-eating British officer remains a hero in Israel 75 years after his death

BY HILLEL KUTTLE

| MARCH 19, 2019 3:47 PM

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



ISRAEL

Prominent pro-Israel donor pulls out of AIPAC conference after saying two Muslim lawmakers 'clash' with American values

BY RON KAMPEAS

| MARCH 19, 2019 11:30 AM

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



POLITICS

Former AIPAC officials launch bipartisan political action committee

BY RON KAMPEAS

| MARCH 19, 2019 12:01 AM

UPDATED MARCH 19, 2019 4:11 PM

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



ISRAEL

Benjamin Netanyahu's views on a Palestinian state, explained

BY BEN SALES

| MARCH 18, 2019 1:21 PM

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send



ISRAEL

A far-right settler who supports legalizing weed could sway Israel's upcoming election

BY BEN SALES

| MARCH 15, 2019 1:38 PM

ADVERTISEMENT

Would you like to receive the JTA Daily Briefing in your inbox?

☐

Yes! (Please fill in your email address.)

☐

No, thanks.

☐

I'm already a subscriber.

Not using [Hotjar](#) yet?

Send